

Massachusetts Office on Disability New Year Statement

On behalf of the Massachusetts Office on Disability I would like to wish everyone a healthy and happy New Year. 2021 is destined to be a better year. 2020 was challenging on so many fronts. The major headlines included a global pandemic which has taken over 350,000 lives, an international social movement rightly screaming out that Black Lives Matter and enough is ENOUGH with the systemic racism, which has allowed so many disparities within the health and criminal justice fields just to name a few, and an opiate epidemic which has continued to rage on taking so many lives with it. As M. Scott Peck, M.D. writes in the first sentence of the 1975 book, *The Road Less Traveled*, "Life Is Difficult." The disability community as a whole is familiar with facing challenges and finding innovative solutions to resolving difficult issues. We are often involved in the work to overcome challenges and break through barriers. People with disabilities have frequently presented themselves as change agents. MOD will continue its main focus of assuring that all people with disabilities in Massachusetts can equally participate in all aspects of life.

Our focus is of course people with disabilities and we especially this year want to focus on raising the voices and concerns of people of color within the community. We have convened a diversity, equity, and inclusion subcommittee within MOD and will be working on internal as well as external DEI goals for this coming year. We will soon be releasing the date for our Disability Summit and will be sharing one of our newer initiatives which is to periodically hold a virtual information session on a variety of topics of interest to the disability community. We are planning on reaching out to different individuals and entities in the disability community to inquire as to what topics of interest people want to learn about. We are and will continue to work on our website and coordinate trainings for the ADA Coordinators in the executive office of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We will continue to work with municipal and state ADA coordinators, state agencies, employees with disabilities, commissions on disability's, and consumers of vocational rehabilitation and independent living centers. It is only because of the dedicated staff at MOD that we can continue our work in 2021. I am amazed on a daily basis at the amount of work that is accomplished through an agency with a staff of 15 people. I am both proud and humble to be the leader of such an important agency and I am excited and hopeful about the things to come in 2021. I would like to quote Travis Roy who was an icon to the disability community and passed away during 2020. In his book *Eleven Seconds*, he writes, "I've no doubt that we all have an inner spirit that makes us capable of doing things we never imagined. Setting new goals, finding new passions - these are the things that prevent us from becoming stagnant. They can lead us to accomplishments of which we only once dreamed."

As I release this statement on 1/7/2021, I can only hope this country and state can find peaceful and non-violent ways to unite and work towards progress. In closing, as Martin Luther King Jr. said in his sermon, *Loving Your Enemies*, "Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding." "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

Sincerely,

Mary Mahon McCauley, Executive Director
Massachusetts Office on Disability